

ACT ONE

The curtain has not yet risen upon the stage. A MAN emerges center stage from between the curtain. HE is dressed in the 18th century attire of an elegant intellectual - shiny waistcoat, pure white britches, nice big wig. There is a self-important - if slightly ridiculous - look about the man that commands our attention. HE appears rather old and yet bristling with a wiry, determined energy. The MAN himself is the French philosopher FRANÇOIS-MARIE AROUET - better known as VOLTAIRE. VOLTAIRE gazes upon us and gestures for silence - which, hopefully, we obey. HE smiles at us and begins to talk grandly with an air of tremendous self-importance:

VOLTAIRE

Welcome, ladies and gentleman, to this fine production of a moving and important theatrical masterpiece. Thank you all for coming and braving the icy gale of tyranny and oppression to sip from this heavenly glass of truth. The crucial play you are about to see is entitled "Philosophus" - which means "philosopher" in Latin - which, of course, is in reference to the star of the masterpiece... namely me. I am François-Marie Arouet - although you may know me as "Voltaire - and the story you are about to see is subtitled "A True and Terrible Recounting" - et cetera, et cetera - for a reason... for it is, indeed, just that - both true and terrible. Indeed, I shall warn you now that there may be certain people among you - especially the fairer sex - who may have to depart from the premises during certain moments of high intrigue and drama or else succumb to the tremors of the moment and collapse, lifeless, before us all. This would only serve to dirty the floor.

The LIGHTS begin to fall.

VOLTAIRE¹

As another reminder, the theatrical organization that has consented to put on this great production has asked me to remind those among you that any mechanical devices - such as cotton gins and clocks - be silenced forthwith. What a blasphemy upon liberty it would be for their gears to make a sound just when I

¹ This portion of Voltaire's monologue can be modified to include the name of the theater and other relevant information.

VOLTAIRE (CONT)

am escaping the greedy grasp of autocracy. Know, above all, that the play you are about to see marks the moment where your current liberty was born and from which it thereafter has not and can never be exorcised from your soul's bosom.

There is now just a SPOTLIGHT on VOLTAIRE.

VOLTAIRE

Before we start, I would give you a few more reminders. First, the year of the play is 1757 - the month, June. Second, the scene is Frankfurt, Germany - which, in June of 1757, was a self-governing city within the Holy Roman Empire. Third, Germany, as such, was not a country, but a group of countries, the greatest of which was Prussia, governed by Frederick the Second, whom some call "the Great" - a sentiment regrettably adopted by your modern historians.

A loud "a-HEM" sounds from the wings - ie: "hurry up, please."

VOLTAIRE

With that, ladies and gentleman... the play begins!

VOLTAIRE gestures grandly. Some mighty ORCHESTRA chords sound with overdone grandeur. Perhaps the music is from Bach. Perhaps it is from Handel. We don't really know and we don't really care - we just want it to stop. The OVERTURE eventually descends to more somber and thoughtful chords. The musical atmosphere suggests the kind of intimacy and peacefulness created in Hollywood movies to herald the twilight hours. The CURTAIN rises on a darkened stage on which we can only barely discern traces of buildings.

One by one - by one - candles light in the windows of the buildings we see before us. A whole world is lit up before our eyes - the world of 18th Century Frankfurt - a bustling city of people and culture. For now, though, the city is relatively quiet because it is quite late at night and most people (the reputable ones) are asleep. The last candles to alight are in a grand-looking building off to the side of the stage - "The Golden Lion" - a well-known inn. A ROWDY SOUND of COMMOTION soon erupts from behind the front door

of this establishment and rudely interrupts the pristine silence of the night. The noise grows louder and louder and louder, until...

BAM!

The front door of the inn flies open and a large suitcase is hurtled onto the stage like a gargantuan stone - THUD!! A LOUD CACOPHONY of CONDEMNATION broadcasts from the unseen interior on the other side of the open door. A minute later... another bag - THUD!... and then another - THUD!... and then another - THUD!... and then... No more bags. VOLTAIRE, still front, still center, emits a gasp.

VOLTAIRE

Aha, it is my cue!

VOLTAIRE scurries offstage. MORE COMMOTION sounds from the open door. It appears the people inside have run out of baggages. We are now down to people. The first to come hurtling out of the door is a small, Sancho Panza-like man with a very Italian mustache - COLLINI. The second to come hurtling out of the open door is the man we just met - VOLTAIRE. HE collapses in an unsightly heap upon COLLINI. A FINAL CACOPHONY of INSULTS comes soaring through the open door before the door itself is SLAMMED SHUT - by whom, we don't know - leaving VOLTAIRE and COLLINI alone. VOLTAIRE struggles to break free.

VOLTAIRE

Get off, you fool!

COLLINI

I cannot, master!

VOLTAIRE

Why cannot you, master?

COLLINI

Because you are on me.

VOLTAIRE

Ah! I have no time for your details. Help me to ascend like the mighty phoenix, rising from its ash.

From its what?

COLLINI

From its ash.

VOLTAIRE

COLLINI sighs and crawls out from under VOLTAIRE. HE stands up and offers VOLTAIRE HIS hand.

COLLINI
Come, master - let me help you off your ash.

VOLTAIRE stares at the hand with evident disapproval. COLLINI understands and sighs again. HE bends down and picks up VOLTAIRE so that HE is standing straight. VOLTAIRE pushes COLLINI away with undue haste.

VOLTAIRE
Let it not happen again, Collini.

COLLINI
Yes, but... I didn't let it happen the first time.

VOLTAIRE
That is immaterial. I hereby declare you responsible for ensuring it does not happen again.
(Looking where.)
Now where are we?

COLLINI
Frankfurt, master.

VOLTAIRE
I know that, Collini.

COLLINI
Then why did you ask where we are?

VOLTAIRE
I was inquiring as to which area of Frankfurt.

COLLINI
I don't know.

VOLTAIRE
(Repeating incredulously.)
You don't know.

COLLINI
No.

VOLTAIRE
Why don't you know?

COLLINI thinks a good, long moment -
 and then:

COLLINI
 I don't know.

VOLTAIRE closes HIS eyes in evident
 mental anguish.

COLLINI
 Would you feel better if I said "I don't remember?"

VOLTAIRE
 Why should I?

COLLINI
 I don't know.

VOLTAIRE
 Tell me, Collini, what do you know?

COLLINI
 I know, master, we are in grave danger.

VOLTAIRE
 Indeed, yes - and, oh, how we suffer for it! The bloodthirsty
 forces of despotism follow every step I take so they can drown
 out the mighty cheers I raise in liberty's name with the
 cacophonous shriek of tyranny. It is impossible to divert the
 King and his minions from our path. I feel they are watching us
 throughout every step of our journey.

COLLINI
 But what can we do, master?

VOLTAIRE
 What else, Collini - but survive?

COLLINI
 I do not understand why the King hates you so.

VOLTAIRE
 He hates me like any spurned lover hates his former betrothed.

COLLINI
 Which is what?

VOLTAIRE
 (With great emotion.)
 Truly.

COLLINI

(Imitating the emotion.)
Truly.

VOLTAIRE

(With even more emotion.)
Utterly.

COLLINI

(Imitating the fierceness.)
Utterly.

VOLTAIRE

Maleficiently and tempestuously!

COLLINI

Mal... mal... what?

VOLTAIRE

... and with so deep a passion that the cavernous bowels of Hell are but a joyful anteroom to the torments and terrors he would wish upon me.

COLLINI

Wow, that's intense.

VOLTAIRE

It is, as you say, "intense."

COLLINI

I wish we had never left Prussia.

VOLTAIRE

How dare you utter such blasphemy.

COLLINI

We had a roof over our heads and luxuries at our feet!

VOLTAIRE

(Grandly dismissive.)
Luxuries - but fleeting glimmers in a twilight sky... so quick to shine, so quick to die!

COLLINI

I know, but I loved them, especially that backscratcher.

VOLTAIRE

You would, for you can be bought, like every simpleton.

COLLINI

I just wish things hadn't gone sour with the King.

VOLTAIRE

Alas, Collini, I have a commitment to liberty that the King does not share - and, while our prior correspondence had convinced me of his glory and drove me like a pilgrim to the Prussian court, I found my new sanctuary to be but a ramshackle tavern on the turnpike to tyranny and thus had no choice but to flee my prison for the free and open plains of liberty.

COLLINI

Really? I thought the King kicked you out because you were rude and obnoxious.

VOLTAIRE

(Erupting - a nerve hit.)

You fool! Do you believe everything you read in the papers?

COLLINI

Well, I was just saying...

VOLTAIRE

The King is but a heartless despot!

COLLINI

All right.

VOLTAIRE

He is a charlatan of the highest order!

COLLINI

Got it.

VOLTAIRE

He is a fake and a fraud and an evil dissembler!

COLLINI

I heard you the first time.

VOLTAIRE

He fancies himself an enlightened man, but he is merely a tyrant in tinsel. The world will learn this soon enough! Fortunate am I that the King revealed his true self to me and unfortunate is he that I have the will to expose him.

COLLINI

You mean... the manuscript?

VOLTAIRE

What do you think I mean?

COLLINI

The manuscript.

VOLTAIRE

The manuscript! Before too long, it will be circulating around the coffee houses of Europe. Oh, how the mighty Frederick will be exposed for the weakling he is.

COLLINI

Isn't that a little, well... nasty?

VOLTAIRE

The war for freedom knows no niceties.

COLLINI

Then, master, if not to advance humanity and decency, what is the point of freedom?

VOLTAIRE glares at COLLINI, unamused by the comment.

VOLTAIRE

I wonder why I bring you along.

COLLINI

Because I carry your bags.

VOLTAIRE

Yet even that you barely do well. They are currently stationary and prostrate before me.

COLLINI

I will get them, master.

VOLTAIRE

No, Collini - don't call me "master." I am not your "master," nor am I anyone else's. Every man is his own master, every man his own king. The very words "master" and "servant" should be banned from every dictionary as a celestial affront to the equality bestowed on each of us by God. The brotherhood of man and the dignity of the individual are the guiding sunrays that bring light to my universe. I hold to them like the most obedient of servants and the most faithful of worshippers. Let no man ever feel he is greater than another or possessing of even remotely superior a station.

(Gesturing to the bags.)

Now get my bags.

COLLINI

Yes, François.

VOLTAIRE

What did you say?

COLLINI

I called you "François."

VOLTAIRE

So I heard - but why?

COLLINI

It's your first name, so I called you by it.

VOLTAIRE

And what brought you to that extraordinary decision?

COLLINI

You said not to call you "master."

VOLTAIRE

Indeed. "Sir" will suffice.

VOLTAIRE nods HIS approval. COLLINI bends down to pick up the bags. HE looks forlornly at "The Golden Lion.'

COLLINI

I'll miss "The Golden Lion."

VOLTAIRE

We were there for but two hours.

COLLINI

Yet, still, it was a place to rest, away from all this running.

VOLTAIRE

Thus, we must find a new refuge.

COLLINI

I know, master - but where?

VOLTAIRE

I know not.

COLLINI

I know not neither.

VOLTAIRE

Well, then, you should! I cannot think of everything, though my genius tends to encourage such suppositions. My mind is already weighed down precipitously by the mortal cares of mankind. Must I also find where we "crash?" Besides, you were the reason we were ejected from our recent sanctuary.

COLLINI

I, master?

VOLTAIRE glares at HIM.

COLLINI

...sir?

VOLTAIRE

Yes, Collini - you. You were the one ogling that woman's breasts.

COLLINI

I did, it is true - but they just looked so familiar.

VOLTAIRE

I'm not surprised, since you studied them all afternoon.

COLLINI

The people there didn't take offense to my staring. They took offense to your demanding three rooms for yourself and then condemning those who refused to move as insidious, bedeviled, uncircumcised philistines.

VOLTAIRE

So?

COLLINI

So they were all women.

VOLTAIRE

"Women?" That is a most generous definition.

COLLINI

Maybe - but their husbands agreed with it.

VOLTAIRE

Details, Collini - details! I am done with your details and merely desire a place in which to repose.

COLLINI

Well, I did see another hotel up the street.

VOLTAIRE

Now you're thinking, Collini. I am much encouraged.

COLLINI

Perhaps I should go there and check on a room?

VOLTAIRE

Perhaps you should.

COLLINI

And then perhaps we could go there to stay?

VOLTAIRE

Perhaps we would.

COLLINI

And then perhaps we could get some sleep?

VOLTAIRE

Perhaps I could.

COLLINI

Good!

(Suddenly noticing the "I" emphasis.)
...I think.

VOLTAIRE

As for you, Collini, you will keep watch.

COLLINI

For what, master?

VOLTAIRE

For the dangers of this world.

COLLINI

But, surely, dangers sleep, too.

VOLTAIRE

Not all, Collini - and never mine. I am forever haunted by the grisly specter of oppression in all its deathly forms. It taunts me like the distant call of the Siren's song from behind the crystal iceberg of temptation. It begs me to embrace it and yet will crash my humble frigate upon its icy protrusions and sink all the dreams I carry as cargo. Yet never again shall I let my eyes be swayed from the truth. I have learned my lesson. I shall accept no more praises from kings. I shall not become trapped in their herculean grasp of bejeweled suffocation. I will be free. I will be brave. I will paint the world with bold colors on its gray and mangled canvas and I will not rest until all men's eyes can share in their rainbowed glory.

VOLTAIRE takes a dramatic pause. HE notices that COLLINI doesn't say a word. VOLTAIRE turns and finds COLLINI asleep on the baggages.

VOLTAIRE

Collini!

COLLINI jumps awake.

COLLINI

I surrender!

VOLTAIRE

Coward! This is why no biographies will be written about you.
(Pointing off in the distance.)
To the hotel!

COLLINI

Yes, sir.

COLLINI nods and grabs all the baggages - or tries to. It takes HIM a few tries to get them all in hand. VOLTAIRE calmly watches HIM throughout. COLLINI then begins to walk offstage - although the "walk" is a slow one. HE is so weighed down by baggages that he can barely move. VOLTAIRE watches with a distinct lack of amusement.

VOLTAIRE

You are slow, Collini.

COLLINI

I am tired, sir.

VOLTAIRE

The battle for freedom cannot be won by tired soldiers. March, Collini, march!

COLLINI

I'm marching, sir.

VOLTAIRE

March faster.

COLLINI

I am!

VOLTAIRE

March!

Suddenly, one of the baggages pops open and clothes spill onto the ground. Among the clothes is a thick manuscript. VOLTAIRE gasps with exaggerated outrage.

VOLTAIRE

Ignoramus! Fool!

COLLINI

I'm sorry, sir! I'm sorry!

VOLTAIRE

You would stand there limply and let the common world gaze upon my undies?

COLLINI

Never, sir.

VOLTAIRE

Oh and for God's sake - and, above all, mine - pick up that manuscript!

COLLINI looks around.

COLLINI

There is no one here, sir.

VOLTAIRE

My enemies are everywhere, Collini.

COLLINI

Everywhere except here.

VOLTAIRE glares and commandingly points to the manuscript. COLLINI puts the manuscript in the baggage and fastens the baggage again. HE picks up the other baggages anew but finds HE has no free hand by which to pick up the remaining bag. COLLINI looks imploringly at VOLTAIRE. VOLTAIRE grandly turns away in denial of assistance. COLLINI kicks the baggage, walks, kicks it again, walks... and so on until HE exits. VOLTAIRE seems to blink at every KICK of the bag. Finally, HE is alone onstage.

VOLTAIRE

Now, finally, I can breathe in the glorious airs of my own silent contemplation.

VOLTAIRE closes HIS eyes and thinks deeply to himself. Then suddenly a MARCH is heard coming from offstage. VOLTAIRE hears this noise, opens HIS eyes, and peers offstage. A look of dread devours HIS face.

VOLTAIRE

Dear God! Oppression on legs.

VOLTAIRE scampers behind some boxes in the background near a large and rather well-off house. The MARCH grows louder and louder and louder. A little man in a soldier's uniform enters - DORN - with a snare drum strapped around HIS waist. HE is banging upon it and playing the march we have been hearing for the past minute or so. HE is followed in quick succession by a grand-looking man bedecked in a suit so bright and full of metals - most of them likely bought at a second-rate pawn shop - that one wonders how HE is

able to stand. The gentleman in question is the representative in Frankfurt of the King of Prussia, Frederick II - BARON FRANZ VON FREYTAG. HE is horrendously pompous with a Hitler-like mustache and a German accent so thick it could cause glass to shatter at fifty yards.

FREYTAG enters grandly behind DORN and together the two men walk to center stage. DORN turns to face us with military precision and promptly ends the march on cue.

FREYTAG

Dorn!

DORN

Yes, mein baron?

FREYTAG

Who is the greatest man in all of Germany?

DORN

The King, mein baron - Frederick of Prussia.

FREYTAG

Correct... Dorn!

DORN

Yes, mein baron?

FREYTAG

Who is the second greatest man in all of Germany?

DORN

You, mein baron - Baron Franz von Freytag.

FREYTAG

Correct... Dorn!

DORN

Yes, mein baron?

FREYTAG

Why am I the second greatest man in all of Germany?

DORN

Because, mein baron, you are the representative of Frederick the Second, King of Prussia - who, as previously stated, is the first greatest man in all of Germany.

FREYTAG

Correct... Dorn!

DORN

Yes, mein baron?

FREYTAG

Give me your report.

DORN

Right away, mein baron.

DORN removes a scroll from HIS jacket,
unravels it, and reads:

DORN

(Barreling through each point without taking a breath.)
Point One - that I, Frederick, King of Prussia, the greatest man in all of Germany, as you may have heard, do hereby command Baron Franz von Freytag, my loyal servant and representative in the city of Frankfurt, to defend the sacredness of my person and hunt down my enemies. Notice Two - that among these enemies is François-Marie Arouet, otherwise known as "Voltaire," as well as "the sneak" and "that frog-eating bastard," who has absconded from my royal palace with a private manuscript of my poetry, which, if ever revealed to the public, would make me look weak and dainty before all Europe. Notice Three - that Baron Franz von Freytag, being my most loyal and obedient servant in the city of Frankfurt, is duty-bound and hereby commanded to retrieve this poetic manuscript from the aforementioned Voltaire and return it safely to my possession in the royal palace at Berlin, so that my manliness will be unquestioned and the fierce reputation of the German people shall continue to terrify the hearts of our friends and enemies.

FREYTAG

Is that it?

DORN

(Out of breath.)
I hope so, mein baron.

FREYTAG

Good! Have you posted armed guards at all entrances and exits to the city?

DORN

Yes, mein baron.

FREYTAG

Good! Have the authorities of the city of Frankfurt pledged their undying cooperation?

DORN

They have, mein baron.

FREYTAG

Good! Did you tell them, if they didn't pledge their undying cooperation, that his royal highness, Frederick, King of Prussia, would burn their fair city to ashes - and then burn the ashes - and then burn the ashes again - and then scatter the charred remnants into the raging seas of the Channel?

DORN

No, mein baron.

FREYTAG

Why is that?

DORN

It didn't seem relevant.

FREYTAG

Well, it is!

DORN

I'm sorry, mein baron.

FREYTAG

What is the recent news of this man Voltaire?

DORN

He fled the court of his royal highness two weeks ago, bound for the French border, and arrived in Frankfurt this morning, according to a number of eyewitnesses. By nightfall, he had taken up residence in "The Golden Lion" inn, as reported to the authorities by a drunken soldier. This report was seconded by the woman directly underneath him at the time.

FREYTAG

Excellent! Where is this inn?

DORN

Behind you, mein baron.

FREYTAG

Excellent! Then lead the way.

DORN

I will, mein baron.

DORN begins playing the march again on the drums. HE abruptly turns and walks to "The Golden Lion." DORN stops playing the drums and knocks politely on the door.

FREYTAG

Dorn!

DORN

Yes, mein baron?

FREYTAG

What are you doing?

DORN

I am knocking, mein baron.

FREYTAG

We are Germans. We do not knock... we enter!

FREYTAG pushes DORN aside and breaks down the door with one swift kick. HE then points DORN towards the door. DORN shrugs and begins playing the march anew. FREYTAG enters "The Golden Lion" and DORN marches in behind HIM. VOLTAIRE waits a moment and then slowly emerges from the boxes. HE is dressed now in ratty, torn clothes with a ridiculous, floppy hat on HIS head. HE looks towards "The Golden Lion" with great alarm. COLLINI enters off to the side of the stage - still carrying/kicking the bags. HE slowly, ever so slowly, approaches center stage. COLLINI then scans the territory for a sign of his master. Without luck, HE turns to the rags-covered VOLTAIRE:

COLLINI

Excuse me, disgusting beggar.

VOLTAIRE waves at COLLINI to be silent.

COLLINI

Look here - I'm talking to you.

VOLTAIRE waves again at COLLINI to be silent with greater frustration.

COLLINI

I wanted to ask if you'd seen my employer.

VOLTAIRE turns upon COLLINI and shushes HIM violently.

COLLINI

(Whispering.)
Oh - it's you, employer.

VOLTAIRE

Keep it down, you fool.

COLLINI

Why are you dressed like that?

VOLTAIRE

I am hiding from the foes of freedom.

COLLINI

...in that?

VOLTAIRE

You scoff, Collini - but I do not. I found these sorry garments discarded behind those boxes there and decided to adorn my body in their pristine humility in order to protect my person from the hawkish eyes of my enemies. No doubt these humble pieces of cloth belong to some much-maligned mendicant who, at this moment, is stalking the misty corridors of life in search of hope and opportunity. Do not scoff at his modest clothes. Do not dismiss the simplicity of his wardrobe. Understand that I am proud to wear these clothes - and why, Collini? Because they are the clothes worn by the meek who will inherit the Earth. I rejoice in their austerity. I worship their poverty. I am proud to bedeck myself in the unfettered honesty of the poor. I just wish I didn't have to smell like them.

Some VOICES sound from "The Golden Lion." The noise reminds VOLTAIRE of the danger surrounding HIM. HE quickly lowers HIS voice again and turns to COLLINI:

VOLTAIRE

(Whispering.)
What did you find at the inn?

COLLINI

(Whispering.)
Alas, sir - they have no vacancies.

VOLTAIRE

(Whispering.)
Pity we couldn't take up residence in the space between your ears.

COLLINI

(Whispering.)
By the way... why are we whispering?

VOLTAIRE

Because, Collini, as we speak, the instruments of oppression are questioning people in "The Golden Lion." The King has sent his men to find me - a blustery baron and a sniveling soldier - two

VOLTAIRE (CONT)

tyrannous agents of autocracy. I must find a safe haven or all hope for human liberty is lost. My demise would be a dagger thrust at the vital artery of freedom.

COLLINI

Perhaps we should hail a cab and flee.

VOLTAIRE

No - it is of no use. The King's men are watching the gates in and out of the city. The cowardly government of Frankfurt is but putty in the hands of the King. They dare not insult the most powerful ruler in Germany.

COLLINI

Then what can we do?

VOLTAIRE

We must hide and devise some clever plan of escape.

COLLINI

Yes, sir - but hide where?

VOLTAIRE

There must be a corner of Earth where freedom still breathes.

COLLINI

Perhaps - but, surely, the King's men will search there also.

WOMAN'S VOICE

You!

VOLTAIRE

Dear God! All is lost!

VOLTAIRE prepares to flee when a loud woman bursts through the door of one of the buildings in the background. SHE is a grizzled, terrifying-looking creature, who, upon first glance, may or may not be a human being. SHE wears a bonnet on HER head that is so massive and metallic it could use its own zip code and HER frown is large enough to span the mouth of the Grand Canyon. This terrifying WOMAN stomps towards VOLTAIRE and COLLINI like a rhinoceros in heat. We shall soon know HER as FRAU SCHMIDT. The two MEN are evidently terrified and back up in terror.

FRAU SCHMIDT

You there! Stop! Don't move a muscle!

VOLTAIRE

I'm a free man and my muscles are mine to move.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Not when they're jiggling on my property, they're not.

VOLTAIRE

Your property?

FRAU SCHMIDT

My property.

VOLTAIRE

I am standing in the street, madame - a public ground.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Wrong! I reference Frankfurt City Ordinance 829-11.

FRAU SCHMIDT whips out a folded piece
of parchment from HER blouse and reads:

FRAU SCHMIDT

(Reading.)

All residents in the city of Frankfurt are deemed as owners and proprietors of all cobblestoned city streets within six meters of the front of their respective establishment and are therefore responsible for the upkeep, maintenance, hole-filling, and manure-cleaning thereof.

(Pointing aggressively at VOLTAIRE.)

You were standing thereof!

VOLTAIRE

I was doing nothing of the sort.

FRAU SCHMIDT

(Pointing to a spot on the ground.)

You were standing here.

VOLTAIRE

(Pointing to a spot about 10 inches away.)

I was standing there.

FRAU SCHMIDT

(Pointing again to her spot.)

You were standing here.

VOLTAIRE

I was standing there.

COLLINI

(Pointing to a spot in-between the other two.)

Actually, he was standing here.

VOLTAIRE

(To COLLINI.)
Shut up, Collini.

(To FRAU SCHMIDT.)
Look, madame - you can still see the imprint of my boot on the stone.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Oh, yes - just like I'll be seeing the imprint of my boot on your ass.

VOLTAIRE

On my what?

FRAU SCHMIDT

On your ass.

VOLTAIRE

I sincerely hope you are referencing the animal.

FRAU SCHMIDT

I am and you are.

VOLTAIRE

I beg your pardon.

FRAU SCHMIDT

You'll be begging for more than that before I'm through.

VOLTAIRE

This is a ridiculous exchange and I shall have no more of it.

(To COLLINI.)
Come, Collini - we're leaving.

VOLTAIRE motions to COLLINI and the TWO start to walk away. FRAU SCHMIDT follows THEM aggressively.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Where do you think you're going?

VOLTAIRE and COLLINI keep walking.

FRAU SCHMIDT

You two better come back here!

VOLTAIRE and COLLINI keep walking.

FRAU SCHMIDT

One more step and I'm calling for the city guard!

VOLTAIRE and COLLINI suddenly freeze and look at EACH OTHER.

Good. Now reverse.

FRAU SCHMIDT

VOLTAIRE and COLLINI slowly walk backwards until THEY are standing next to FRAU SCHMIDT again. SHE grins inanely, showing off some dirty teeth, and has a good look at VOLTAIRE. SHE then abruptly turns to COLLINI, scaring HIM half to death:

You! What's your name?

FRAU SCHMIDT

M... my name's Collini.

COLLINI

(Suddenly pleasant.)
Aha - an Italian.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Yes, madame.

COLLINI

(Suddenly ferocious.)
I hate Italians!

FRAU SCHMIDT

Yes, madame.

COLLINI

(Turning on VOLTAIRE.)
You! What's your name?

FRAU SCHMIDT

If you must know, madame, I am...

VOLTAIRE

VOLTAIRE is about to proclaim HIS name loudly and glorious when HE catches COLLINI gesturing vaguely with HIS eyes: "Don't reveal your identity! - so instead:

Fred.

VOLTAIRE

You're who?

FRAU SCHMIDT

Fred.

VOLTAIRE

Fred who? FRAU SCHMIDT

Yes. VOLTAIRE

Yes what? FRAU SCHMIDT

He's Fred - that's who. COLLINI

I see. FRAU SCHMIDT

You do? VOLTAIRE, COLLINI

So, Fred, what is your trade? FRAU SCHMIDT

(Bursting with pride.) VOLTAIRE
If you must know, I am a philosopher.

Oh, really - and exactly how long have you been unemployed? FRAU SCHMIDT

VOLTAIRE glares at HER.

Excuse me, madame... COLLINI

What is it, Foolini? FRAU SCHMIDT

Exactly what do you want from us? COLLINI

Justice. FRAU SCHMIDT

Indeed! It just so happens I am an expert on that subject. VOLTAIRE

Good - so you know what it's like to be wronged, like I've been wronged by two criminals trespassing on my property - a poor, meager woman, whose husband is away - alone and defenseless and at the mercy of strangers... FRAU SCHMIDT

(Barely able to take it all.) VOLTAIRE
Dear God...

FRAU SCHMIDT
 ...but, for a small fee, I might be obliged to forget my fears
 and perhaps lose my voice, as well.

VOLTAIRE
 This is connivery.

FRAU SCHMIDT
 This is negotiation.

VOLTAIRE
 I shall pay no fee.

FRAU SCHMIDT
 In that case...
 (Calling offstage.)
 Guards!

COLLINI
 How much do you want, madame?

FRAU SCHMIDT
 That depends.

VOLTAIRE
 On what?

FRAU SCHMIDT
 On what's in those baggages.

VOLTAIRE
 This is daylight robbery.

FRAU SCHMIDT
 This is nighttime negotiation.

Just then FREYTAG'S voice sounds from
 "The Golden Lion":

FREYTAG'S VOICE
 Dorn!

VOLTAIRE and COLLINI exchange a
 frightened glance.

VOLTAIRE
 Come, madame, let us talk.

FRAU SCHMIDT
 We are.

VOLTAIRE
 Yes, but I mean in your beautiful house.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Oh? Why?

VOLTAIRE

Because it is getting cold as the night draws evermore near and I am worried for your constitution.

FRAU SCHMIDT

It's seventy degrees.

COLLINI

It could always drop.

VOLTAIRE

The weather is as fickle as the friendship of kings.

FRAU SCHMIDT looks from VOLTAIRE to COLLINI and back again - thinking, thinking, thinking - then:

FRAU SCHMIDT

Well, I suppose...

VOLTAIRE, COLLINI

Thank you!

VOLTAIRE and COLLINI hurriedly bolt through the front door of the FRAU SCHMIDT'S HOUSE. FRAU SCHMIDT looks after THEM with a puzzled expression. A MARCHING SOUND is heard. FREYTAG and DORN enter from "The Golden Lion." DORN is playing on the drums again. FREYTAG sees FRAU SCHMIDT and commands DORN to cease, which HE does. FREYTAG then approaches FRAU SCHMIDT with an oily smile.

FREYTAG

Good evening, Frau Schmidt.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Good evening, mein baron.

FREYTAG

Is your husband in the house?

FRAU SCHMIDT

No - he is out making his rounds.

FREYTAG

I am surprised to see you out by yourself at this late hour. The streets of Frankfurt can be very dangerous.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Yes, I know. I just had two strangers trespass on my property.

FREYTAG

Did you just say... "strangers?"

FRAU SCHMIDT

Yes - very, very strange-ers.

FREYTAG

What did they look like?

FRAU SCHMIDT

(Considering HIM suspiciously.)

It is hard to say. My eyes are not good - and it is so dark.

FREYTAG

Dorn!

DORN steps forward.

DORN

Was one short like a tree stump, fat like a marble, with little chubby legs and a big, moon-like head and was the other tall, lanky, wrinkled like a thumb emerging from the ocean, with big, beady eyes and a mouth like a soulless void?

FRAU SCHMIDT considers FREYTAG and DORN for a moment. The description describes VOLTAIRE and COLLINI rather well.

FRAU SCHMIDT

No - not at all.

FREYTAG

Oh? What did they look like, then?

FRAU SCHMIDT

I told you - the darkness makes it hard for me.

FREYTAG

Try, Frau Schmidt. What did these men look like who trespassed on your property?

FRAU SCHMIDT

They were... two black men.

FREYTAG

Two black men?

DORN

(To us.)
Typical.

FREYTAG

Where are these strange men now?

FRAU SCHMIDT

They have gone, for I scared them away.

DORN

(To us.)

I'm not surprised.

FREYTAG

I see. You are very brave, Frau Schmidt.

(Shifting HIS gaze to the baggages.)

Traveling, are you?

FRAU SCHMIDT

I was thinking of visiting my family in Hamburg.

FREYTAG

Surely, you do not need so much baggage for the trip.

FRAU SCHMIDT

That remark proves you are a man, mein baron - although no woman needs proof of that.

FREYTAG smiles contentedly at this flattering remark. FRAU SCHMIDT takes the opportunity to change the subject

FRAU SCHMIDT

Who are these men you are looking for? What have they done?

FREYTAG

The greatest thief of the two is a man known as Voltaire - a so-called "philosopher" from France - who, having previously, at the invitation of my master, King Frederick, served in the royal court of Prussia, grew in insolence and rebellion and was dismissed abruptly from the court, taking with him a sensitive personal item of His Majesty's.

FRAU SCHMIDT

And the second of the thieves?

FREYTAG

The philosopher's Italian valet.

FRAU SCHMIDT

I shall be sure to watch out for them.

FREYTAG

Thank you, Frau Schmidt.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Thank you, mein baron.

FREYTAG and FRAU SCHMIDT stare at EACH OTHER for a moment. EACH ONE appears to be waiting for the other to move - but nothing happens. FREYTAG eventually nods slowly, salutes, turns to DORN, and begins to march out. DORN hops back into character, strikes up a march on the drums, and exits right behind HIM. FRAU SCHMIDT thinks to HERSELF with a huge grin plastered across HER face and turns to face the house:

FRAU SCHMIDT

Fred?

No answer.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Fred?

No answer.

COLLINI'S VOICE

She means you, sir.

A LOUD GROWL erupts from the house. VOLTAIRE opens the door and peeks HIS head out. FRAU SCHMIDT considers HIM with amusement.

FRAU SCHMIDT

What are you looking for, Fred?

VOLTAIRE

You have a wonderful front yard, madame.

FRAU SCHMIDT

I don't have a front yard.

VOLTAIRE

It has great potential.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Do you and your friend want to come back out?

VOLTAIRE

Ah... well... it is getting cold out here.

VOLTAIRE and FRAU SCHMIDT look at EACH OTHER. VOLTAIRE shivers loudly, as if to emphasize HIS point.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Would you like a coat, then... Monsieur Voltaire?

A LOUD SMASH emits from the house, as
COLLINI drops a jug on the floor.
VOLTAIRE jumps in pain.

VOLTAIRE

Ouch, that was my foot!

COLLINI'S VOICE

I thought it was her jug.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Come out - now - and bring your greasy Italian friend.

VOLTAIRE gestures to COLLINI, who
appears next to HIM. THEY walk into the
street - very tepidly - and stand
before FRAU SCHMIDT.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Give me one good reason why I shouldn't turn you two in.

VOLTAIRE

Perhaps I might appeal to a mutual, human love of freedom.

FRAU SCHMIDT

No. I don't love anything - least of all my country and least of
all freedom. I love money - and that is to your benefit - so I'd
suggest you use it.

VOLTAIRE

(TO COLLINI.)

I so detest women. They are rough, rude, and completely without
feeling.

COLLINI

Surely, madame, you won't turn us in?

FRAU SCHMIDT

Perhaps not - but that fine I mentioned... has risen.

VOLTAIRE

This is the end of the line!

FRAU SCHMIDT

This is the market economy!

COLLINI

How much has your fine risen?

FRAU SCHMIDT

How much is freedom worth to you?

VOLTAIRE

Freedom, madame, is priceless.

FRAU SCHMIDT

That much, huh?

COLLINI

Monsieur Voltaire is a very wealthy man.

VOLTAIRE

You spineless fool! You would sacrifice the fresh fruit of dignity for an unseemly seedling of security?

COLLINI

Yes.

VOLTAIRE

I can have no part in this torrid affair.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Well, then, it's to the dungeon with you.

VOLTAIRE

... and yet, as a conscientious employer in this ruthless world of despotism and exploitation, I believe in my paternal duty to those workers under my care - and, for that reason, in recognition of my enlightened sense of responsibility to the desperate and the dependent, I will use a portion of my fortune to secure Collini's release - and, alongside that, regrettably secure my own, as the safety of my loyal, devoted, faithful manservant cannot be guaranteed without the clear and ever-present proximity of my person.

(To FRAU SCHMIDT.)

Do you accept money orders?

FRAU SCHMIDT

I want cash.

VOLTAIRE

Cash?

COLLINI

Cash?

FRAU SCHMIDT

Cash!

VOLTAIRE

You are a villain!

FRAU SCHMIDT

I am a capitalist!

VOLTAIRE

As such, you have no class.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Actually, I'm all about class.

VOLTAIRE

Indeed. Well, I wager there are not enough coins in my purse to fill your financial lust.

COLLINI

(To FRAU SCHMIDT.)

Would you accept a payment plan?

VOLTAIRE

Collini!

FRAU SCHMIDT

I would consider it.

COLLINI

We're all set then.

FRAU SCHMIDT

...with interest.

VOLTAIRE

You are a bloodsucking parasite!

FRAU SCHMIDT

I am an enterprising businesswoman!

COLLINI

I'm sure my employer would be willing to provide all that he is able. We can discuss...

(Gesturing.)

...inside.

FRAU SCHMIDT considers COLLINI with suspicion. SHE then nods cautiously and gestures to the house.

VOLTAIRE

No, no - after you. Ladies first.

FRAU SCHMIDT turns and begins to walk towards the house. VOLTAIRE quickly jumps up behind HER, grabs HER huge bonnet, and pulls it down over HER eyes. FRAU SCHMIDT emits a squawk of confusion. VOLTAIRE kicks HER through the front door of the house and quickly shuts the door. HE then grabs a piece

of wood from among the boxes and uses it to barricade the door shut.

COLLINI

Oh, no! Sir! What are you doing?

VOLTAIRE

I am setting alight the bonfires of freedom.

COLLINI

Yes, but shouldn't you get down off the kindling first?

VOLTAIRE

As before, Collini, you are a coward and a weakling! That hideous vulture was aiming to pluck away my dignity as if it were a carcass for her to feast upon. We cannot be afraid to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. We must be prepared for action. We must be prepared to fight.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Help! Mein baron! City guards!

VOLTAIRE

...and run.

COLLINI

(Looking at the baggages.)
But where, sir - and how?

VOLTAIRE

Just bring the bag with the manuscript. I noticed a coachman park his carriage one street down as you were busy negotiating away your freedom with that ugly German sow.

COLLINI

So?

VOLTAIRE

So, if we run, we can make it and head for the city gates.

COLLINI

But, surely, we will be discovered!

VOLTAIRE

Not if we move quickly! The hour is still young!

COLLINI

The hour, yes, but I'm not! I cannot move so quickly!

VOLTAIRE

You can and you shall!
(Pointing dramatically.)
Onward! To freedom!